

Cooperative Program rebounds

Giving begins recovery from member drop, bad economy

NASHVILLE (BP and local reports) — Despite a five-year decline in Southern Baptist church membership and a corresponding decrease in per capita giving, the national portion of the Cooperative Program (CP) shows signs of rebounding through the first five months of fiscal 2014-15.

Year-to-date contributions to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Cooperative Program Allocation Budget through Jan. 31 totaled \$64,702,036, the highest amount since the Jan. 31, 2012, report.

The numbers may be a harbinger that local churches are recovering from the lingering effects of the Great Recession. As of Feb. 28, receipts totaled \$82,098,104, or nearly 105% of the \$78,333,333 year-to-date budgeted amount to support SBC ministries globally and nationally.

The total is \$2,371,418 more than the \$79,726,686 received through February 2014.

The two SBC seasonal missions offerings — Lottie

Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions (LMCO) and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions (AAEO) — have also shown positive signs of rebound.

After plummeting from \$150 million in 2007 to \$141 million in 2008, offerings to LMCO slowly edged upward through 2012 before reaching and surpassing 2007's previous high in 2013, topping \$154 million for a new record though still short of the \$175 million goal.

Similarly, gifts to AAEO declined from its record \$59 million in 2007 before beginning to recover in 2011 and reaching \$58 million in 2014, the third highest amount in history.

For the first time in five years, gifts to the 2014 Mississippi CP budget exceeded budget needs, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) stewardship director Rick Blythe reported earlier this year.

The 2014 Mississippi CP budget was set by messengers from local churches to the an-

nual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention at \$31,621,435. CP giving from Mississippi Baptists in 2014 actually totaled \$32,119,685.

MBCB executive director-treasurer Jim Futral said at the time, "The downturn of the economy affected all our churches and all our families across the state. It has been a long struggle and for many people continues to be."

"Through it all, our people in our churches have remained faithful to the call of Christ in sharing their resources through difficult times... We thank God for the faithfulness of Mississippi Baptists."

The Cooperative Program was established in 1925 as a collaborative effort between the SBC and state Baptist conventions. The plan was remarkably simple:

- Individuals give tithes and offerings to their local churches.

- The churches forward a percentage of their contributions to their state Baptist convention for ministry in the state.

■ The state convention forwards a percentage of its funds to provide support for SBC missions and ministries.

Through a unified, cooperative program of giving, both state ministry needs and ministry endeavors of the SBC are funded. This cooperative venture between churches, state conventions, and the SBC was given the name Cooperative Program.

The positive CP report stands against the stark reality that giving to Southern Baptist churches for all causes — general budget gifts, missions offerings, missions trips, and other church ministry needs — declined by more than \$911 million, or 7.5%, from 2008 to 2013, according to the Annual Church Profile submitted by cooperating Southern Baptist churches.

Total membership declined by a little over three percent during the same period of time, from 16,228,438 to 15,735,640, a loss of almost one-half million people. Per capita giving also declined over the same period, from \$746.91 per member in 2008 to \$712.37 in 2013.

The combination of declining membership and declining per capita giving impacted the ability of local churches to do ministry in their communities and beyond, and has been felt by both state Baptist conventions and the SBC.

For example, even though churches increased the percentage of their undesignated receipts forwarded through the Cooperative Program from 5.4% in 2011 to 5.5% in 2013, the actual dollar amount of CP continued to decline, hovering at a 14-year low the past two years.

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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

Lone Rangers

Executing reports are being told about Mississippi Baptists' mission trips all across the world during this year's spring break week. One group totaled more than 160 missions enthusiasts. At least one entire family dedicated their week off to going on a mission trip together. There were mountains climbed, rivers forded, and strange food eaten.

The greatest part of all these reports is the singular core purpose of each trip — to help bring people to a saving knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as He commanded us to do in Matthew 28:18-20. What greater motivation could we have?

Still, we need to be sure all our "t's" and "i's" are crossed and dotted before we head out on our far-flung missions adventures. Remember the ten Christian volunteers arrested and held in a Haiti jail in 2010, in one of the most bizarre stories to arise in the aftermath of the massive earthquake that struck the desperately poor Caribbean island nation?

To summarize, the ten volunteers — nine of whom were Southern Baptists from Texas and Idaho — were detained at the Haitian border with the Dominican Republic, the nation that shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti. The volunteers, who had no recognized affiliation with Baptist disaster relief or aid groups, had 33 Haitian children with them when they were stopped.

This is where it gets confusing. Initial news reports filtering back to the U.S. indicated that the American volunteers said they were attempting to place the children, orphaned by the earthquake, in a facility in the Dominican Republic that could care for them. News reports a few days later indicated that none of the children were orphans but had living parents or close relatives in two small villages devastated by the earthquake.

Different parties to this strange episode all have their versions of what actually happened, but Haitian authorities moved in quickly to take custody of the children and charge the ten volunteers with kidnapping.

Eight of the volunteers were released after weeks of legal wrangling, and the remaining two were also eventually released. The 33 children were placed with an Austrian aid group working with the Haitian government.

Into the mix of charges, denials, and accusations, add a shady legal advisor being sought by the U.S. Marshals Service and a host of other strange characters in a country where, thanks

to the earthquake, the court system and government in general were struggling to stay afloat, and this became a real quagmire — and an unnecessary one.

Morris Chapman, who at the time was president of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, issued a statement upon the release of the eight volunteers in which he stressed the importance of being qualified and prepared to enter hazardous areas after massive natural disasters.

"This entire situation has been unfortunate for everyone involved — the Haitian people as well as the volunteers, their families, and churches," Chapman said. "Hopefully, it will serve as a reminder that there is no shortcut for proper training and orientation before embarking on short-term ministry trips."

"I pray this will be a catalyst for more of our cooperating churches to take advantage of disaster relief training offered through our North American Mission Board."

Mississippi Baptists have one of the most well-trained and knowledgeable disaster relief programs in the Southern Baptist Convention, headquartered in the Men's Ministry Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board and allied with the greater Southern Baptist effort.

"Getting there first doesn't always equal getting there with your best," said Jim Didlake, who at the time was Men's Ministry director for Mississippi Baptists. "No one should go in without a plan."

"The idea that 'we have to be there or nothing will happen' is not true," said Don Gann, who at the time was a consultant in the Men's Ministry Department and is now the director. "After Hurricane Katrina, there were months and months of work to do. Everyone who wanted to get involved was able to help — just not at the same time."

There are many elements in the saga of the arrested volunteers that still don't make sense, but a number of conclusions do emerge: Be patient. Don't take matters into your own hands like some sort of modern-day Lone Ranger. Do join a Baptist disaster relief group and get trained. Work with local Baptist churches and groups in the disaster area, who will ultimately make a long-term difference.

Don't let an entirely avoidable crisis spoil your mission trip. Plug in to a program where you really can make a difference for the Lord. You'll be glad you did.

Annie's special offering

We are grateful for every dollar Southern Baptists give to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions. Sometimes you might feel far-removed from the results of the offering, so let me remind you of a few.

What you give to Annie helps Southern Baptists start new churches where they are needed most. In 2014, Southern Baptists planted 985 new churches. That's up five percent over the previous year, and in some places the increases were even more dramatic.

In Ohio, 37 new churches were started — an increase of 20 over the previous year. In New York, there were 42 new churches — an increase of 22. In the Northwest Convention, which includes Oregon, Washington State, and parts of Idaho, 27 churches were started — 24 more than the previous year.

All these dramatic increases came in states outside the South, where Southern Baptists have not been as strong. It's a privilege to work alongside churches and our state convention partners to get these new congregations going. Your giving to the Annie Offering makes these new church plants possible. These are churches that are reaching new people for Christ right now and our prayer is that they will be doing so for years to come.

The offering also helped place nearly 1,800 student missionaries on the North American mission field last year. This number is up from only a couple of hundred students a few years ago. It is encouraging to see because we need a new generation of missionaries to meet the growing needs in North America.

In all, there are more than 5,600 church planters and other missionaries in North America who receive some kind of support from the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and the Annie Offering is the way we are able to do most of that. More than half of the



Guest opinion with Kevin Ezell

funds we have available each year come through this offering.

The need is great and growing. We need thousands more churches in and around large cities where more than 81% of North Americans live. In an effort to narrow the widening gap between population and the number of churches in these areas, NAMB is giving special emphasis to 32 of these cities.

Church planting in our cities is expensive. Renting or buying worship space is very costly. Housing for our church planters is prohibitive in many places. Church plants usually take several years before they are fully supported by their own congregations.

The Annie Offering helps us plant churches beyond cities as well. Maine, a largely rural state, is experiencing more church planting activity than has been seen in years. Alaska averaged about two church starts a year but in 2012-13 that number shot up to 19.

Your prayers for these missionaries mean so much and your giving is truly making a difference. Thank you for your partnership in pushing back lostness in North America.

Ezell is president of the North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, Ga. For more information, visit AnnieArmstrong.com. Find resources to help your church promote the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering at www.AnnieArmstrong.com.

Your giving to the Annie Offering makes these new church plants possible. These are churches that are reaching new people for Christ right now and our prayer is that they will be doing so for years to come.

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American pastor continues to languish in Iran prison



ABEDINI

"We have continued to work with the U.S. State Department as we pressure the administration not to leave Pastor Saeed behind as it sits at the negotiating table with Iran...There can be no deal with Iran as it imprisons and torments our own citizens."

Jordan Sekulow
ACLJ executive director

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — After imprisoned American pastor Saeed Abedini witnessed fellow prisoners being beaten and taken to their executions in Iran's Rajai Shahr prison last week, the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) called on the U.S. not to make any nuclear deal in current negotiations with Iran until it releases Abedini.

"We have continued to work with the U.S. State Department as we pressure the administration not to leave Pastor Saeed behind as it sits at the negotiating table with Iran," ACLJ executive director Jordan Sekulow wrote in a March 7 news release. "...There can be no deal with Iran as it imprisons and torments our own citizens."

ACLJ is representing the Abedini family in the ongoing campaign to have the pastor released and returned to the U.S. Abedini is a native of Iran

and still has family there. He was arrested and convicted by Iranian authorities while in the country to work on an orphanage.

The U.S., Iran, and five other nations are in negotiations concerning a deal that reportedly would limit Iran's nuclear program. A March 24 deadline has been set for establishing the framework of a final accord.

Abedini was "quite shaken" after he witnessed "six fellow prisoners being beaten and taken to be executed" March 4, his wife Naghme Abedini wrote on Facebook March 5. "It was a hard and dark day having witnessed that and seeing life being taken," Naghme Abedini and the couple's two young children are in the U.S.

Naghme Abedini's report came after Saeed's father visited him in prison, a visit that was "very hard as the families of those who were executed were crying and wailing,"

Naghme wrote. The visit was also emotional because the Abedinis' son Jacob is approaching his seventh birthday and has not seen his father since he was age four, Naghme Abedini wrote.

She requested prayer "for Saeed to have the strength to endure in that harsh prison and that Jesus would continue to meet him there and give him hope. Please pray that this will be the year that Saeed is released."

Saeed Abedini has been imprisoned since Sept. 26, 2012, because of his Christian faith. He was sentenced Jan. 27, 2013, to eight years in prison on charges he threatened national security by planting house churches in Iran years earlier, and had been under house arrest since July 2012.

Abedini suffers from internal injuries sustained during prison beatings, Sekulow reported, adding that "summary executions, inmate violence,

and beatings are commonplace" in the facility where he is detained.

U.S. President Barack Obama met with Naghme Abedini and the couple's children near their home in Boise, Idaho, on Jan. 21, and said securing Saeed's release remains a "top priority." Obama received a letter from the imprisoned pastor a week later thanking the president for visiting his family.

"President Obama, you have my prayers from inside of these walls," Saeed Abedini wrote.

Sekulow said in his March 7 release that the Obama administration "must do all within its power to bring this wrongfully imprisoned U.S. citizen home to his family in America."

No actions by The White House on Saeed Abedini's behalf have been publicly disclosed since Obama met with his family.

Creationists: Latest evolution 'discovery' not so exciting after all

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (BP and local reports) — Evolutionary biologists have announced the recent discovery in France of a hybrid fern species they claim to be as exciting as discovering a manatee could produce offspring with an elephant or a human with a lemur.

Creationists are yawning.

The fern, *Cystocarpium roskamianum*, appears to be the product of two species of ferns that diverged from each other 60 million years ago, according to evolutionary theory, and have not interbred since, the researchers reported in the journal *The American Naturalist*.

However, this discovery is nothing new, according to Casey Luskin, research coordinator for the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture in Seattle, Wa.

"It's been long-known that plants can hybridize, and many plants appear designed to form hybrids," he told *WORLD News Service*. "Many of our own cultivated garden plants are the result of hybridization."

Although the fern is a fascinating discovery, it is not problematic for a creationist like Fazale Rana, a biochemist at Reasons to Believe in Covina, Ca. The discovery actually attests to creationism in two ways, he said.

First, "it represents a problem for evolutionists because it shows there are things being discovered that fail to affirm the evolutionary paradigm. You wouldn't expect that hybridization to take place. It's the work of a creator used to create a novel organism," Rana said.

Secondly, a species that can adapt to the environment and give rise to a sister species demonstrates God's design in giving living things the ability to respond to changes in the environment, Rana said.

Rana compares this adaptability to the way a thermostat works, signaling the air conditioner to kick in when the room becomes too warm and the heat when the room becomes too cool. It is a feedback loop in which the thermostat responds to changes in the environment.

Evolutionary biologists assume all life arose from a common ancestor and different species diverged through the processes of natural selection and random adaptation. Once a new species evolves, they say, it gradually develops reproductive incompatibilities that prohibit it from reproducing with the "parent species" from which it diverged, creating the diversity of species.

"The formation of reproductive barriers between popula-



CYSTOCARPIMUM ROSKAMIANUM

tions is of central importance to evolutionary biology," the scientists said.

The researchers concluded the fern's discovery implies the diversity of species that exists today may not be wholly accounted for by adaptation, but may also be the product of varied rates of the speciation clock — the rate at which a type of organism develops reproductive incompatibility with other related species.

The speciation clock is calculated by fossil records and molecular clock techniques that look at genes and rates of change at the molecular level to

deduce the time in history that two species diverged.

However, molecular clock techniques are notoriously fraught with difficulties and make dubious assumptions, Luskin said. For example, some molecular clock studies have yielded widely divergent dates for the supposed most recent common ancestors of animals.

Some of those calculations would absurdly place the common ancestor as having existed prior to the origin of the universe, Luskin noted in an *Evolution News* article. The errors exist because "mutation rates aren't necessarily constant, re-

searchers ignore the possibility of intelligent design, and common ancestry was a dubious assumption to begin with."

Biologists' comparison of the new fern to a manatee mating with an elephant seems highly inappropriate, Luskin said. While hybrids can occasionally occur between very closely related animal species, animal hybrids are exceedingly rare. Genetic differences between living organisms are often far greater than an evolutionary view would suggest.

"Maybe that's because evolution isn't what generated their history," Luskin said.

March Madness is tournament time for basketball enthusiasts. All the tournaments that lead up to the big tournament take place and then the countdown begins to the national championship. Even if you don't know anything or much about basketball, I think you can probably benefit from the brilliant instructions I overheard being given by a grandfather to his grandson. Basketball is a rather simple game. It is said that John Wooden, possibly the finest basketball coach in history, would begin the season by getting all of his team together and holding the basketball he would say, "This is a basketball," and pointing to the goal say, "that is the goal. Now all we have to do is learn to take the basketball and put it in the goal." Simple enough, yet in reality, it is more complicated than that and in truth, the nuances of the game may very well be the most complicated thing about it.

But let me pass along the instructions that this wise grandfather gave to his young grandson who wanted to learn more about basketball. Granddad told him he would help him and immediately the boy wanted to go get the ball. The grandfather said, "No, before we get the ball, you need to learn some things about basketball without the ball." And the coaching lessons began.

Instruction number one was that you must learn to have your feet and hands in position at all times. Unless you have your hands properly placed and your feet controlled, it doesn't matter if you're on offense or defense. If you happen to get the ball, you probably couldn't do anything with it. So the instructions began to take shape in a boy's life by helping him get in the proper position. The lesson that is clearly pertaining to those of us who



Magnificent Instructions for March Madness

are the children of God is that we need to get in position, where He wants us to be and when He wants us to be there. Only then can He use us.

The second word of instruction is to remember the goal never moves. What an incredible word. Now anybody who ever played one game of basketball surely knows that the goal on either end of the court is fixed and never changes. Throughout the game they stay right in place and everything that happens revolves around staying focused on a goal. The unchanging lesson for the children of God is similar, that the kingdom work that Jesus has called us to never changes. Make disciples of all nations, baptizing, teaching, reaching. Now on the basketball court, everything else is moving and active. The members of both teams are running every direction and running plays back and forth. The referees are running up and down the

court to catch someone committing a foul. Even the coaches on the sideline are waving their arms and yelling instructions and moving about, but the goal never moves. Sometimes it might do us a world of good if we just stopped and considered this word of instruction. Sometimes church members are running in all directions, jumping up and down, upset about something, running to each other, running away from people, and like in the middle of a heated game it may look like chaos but great players and winning teams never lose sight of the fact that the goal never moves.

A third bit of wisdom was, always remember you are one move from the next shot. Now think about that. Whether you're getting a pass from someone or whether you are trying to steal the ball, in a split second, you need to know where you are and be ready to do the most important thing in the game — shoot and score. The child

of God ought to live in constant awareness that a moment of time may be most opportune to share the good news of Jesus with someone. It could be at work. It could be at school. It could be in church together, and with the snap of your fingers, everything is right for you to take the shot. You don't need to miss it. For God Himself has placed you there so stay ready.

One final thought of basketball and spiritual instruction would be that you always need to know where the other nine players are. No, it's not a matter of you keeping up with your four teammates or even trying to keep up with the five who are playing on the opposing side; you need to stay alert and aware of where everybody is. Whether they are on your side or against you, they can make a difference in your life. Sometimes I see Christians who only keep up with their little group. They ignore other people. They are disconnected and uncaring about some of them and there they are huddled with one or two or three feel-good friends and they miss out, not only on the opportunity to know people better and have a greater relationship, but they miss out on the bigger blessing of having opportunity to be a blessing.

I'm not encouraging you to find time to sit back and drink in all the March Madness basketball games that are going on; that may not appeal to you at all, but I do want to encourage you to look at these basketball instructions as they take hold of the spiritual dimensions of our life so that we can be more effective and truly be winners in the Lord's work.

The author can be contacted at directions@mbcb.org.

College News

► The William Carey University Fial School of Nursing was named the School of Nursing of the Year and Dr. Janet Williams, Carey's dean of nursing, was named School of Nursing Administrator of the Year by the Mississippi Nurses' Association during the annual Nightingale Awards Gala in Jackson on March 2. The Nightingale Awards are sponsored by the association and the Mississippi Nurses' Foundation to honor outstanding nurses and health care professionals. The awards are known as the "Academy Awards" of quality service in the nursing and health care industry.

► Mississippi College is hosting its Spring Preview Day Apr. 11. Visitors can expect a welcome at 9:30 a.m.; visit classes at 11 a.m.; lunch; an open house at Providence Hill farm at 2 p.m.; and a baseball game at 2 p.m. For more information and registration, visit www.mc.edu/previewday or call (601) 925-3800.

Just for the Record



TERRY'S CREEK CHURCH, MAGNOLIA, hosted the Pike Association senior adult Valentines luncheon. Uncle Gabby (Charles Davis) presented the program. LaVerne Summerlin, pastor; Steve Clark, AMD.



LIBERTY CHURCH, PONTOTOC, surprised their pastor Harvey Sewell and his wife Linda with a celebration of their 40 years in ministry Feb. 22.



The children of **BRANCH CHURCH, MORTON**, performed a drama, *Marvelous Light*, Mar. 1. Shown are Vaden Latham, Alyssa Ainsworth, Hunter Ainsworth, Staci Herrington, and McKenzie Ainsworth.

In other Church News:

► **Rawls Springs Church, Hattiesburg**, will host a bonfire and cookout Mar. 22, 5 p.m.

► **First Church, Stonewall**, will host a reception honoring Nina Rigdon for her many years of mission service Mar. 29, 2-4 p.m.

► **Embrace Church, Forest**, is holding its launch service Mar. 22, 10 a.m.

► **First Church, Crystal Springs**, is hosting a veteran's special recognition program Mar. 21, 6 p.m.

► **The Oktibbeha County/Golden Triangle Association WMU** spring meeting will be held Mar. 23 at Fellowship Church, Starkville, 9 a.m. — noon. Covered dish lunch. Sarah Hardin, former missionary to Guatemala and coordinator for international ministry at Mississippi State's BSU, guest speaker.

► **Shiloh Church, Vaiden**, will host the Revelations in concert Mar. 22, 10:30 a.m. Love offering. Doug Warren, pastor.

What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the

HOUSE TOPS.

Matthew 10:27 NAS

March 19, 2015

HouseTops is a Baptist Record supplement produced by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board's Communication Services.



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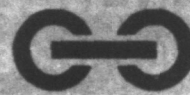
SENIOR ADULT DAY RETREATS

Emmanuel BC, Grenada
Tuesday, May 19

Salem Heights BC, Laurel
Thursday, May 21

FBC, Natchez
Tuesday, May 26

For more information contact the
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at 601-292-3284, E-mail dbrashier@mbcb.org



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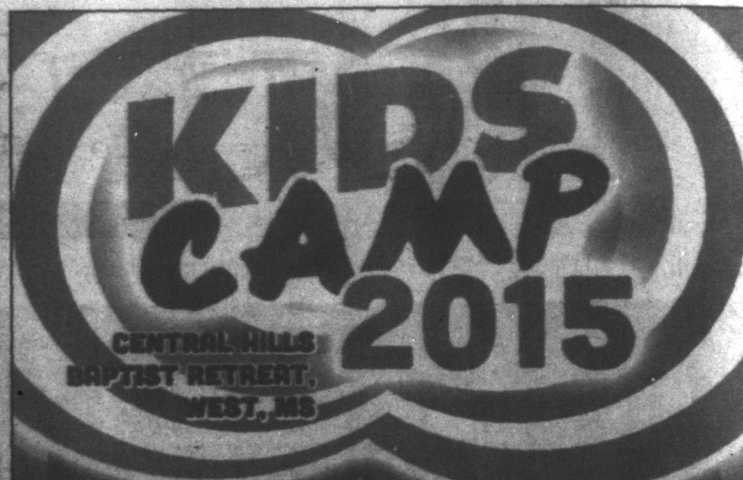
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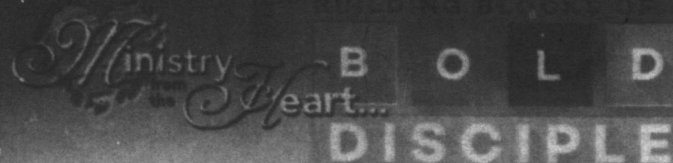
Session 1: June 15-17

Session 2: June 18-20

Session 3: June 22-24

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MBCB at 800-748-1651, Ext. 378, or 601-292-3378, or E-mail at
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OASIS 2015

Missions Leaders,

Looking for your next missions project? Well, we hope you will consider the OASIS 2015 Project. On October 22-26, 2015, a retreat for single career missionaries will take place in Malaysia. The purpose of the retreat is to provide opportunities for worship, fellowship, and encouragement. More than 85% of the single missionaries serving in this area of the world are women. Since our missionaries attend this retreat at their own expense, we want to say "thank you" to them for their service by sponsoring their participation in the retreat this year. The cost per person is \$900 and this includes all their expenses. All donors will be provided the name (or initials) of a missionary so you can pray for them during the retreat. **The DEADLINE to participate is April 2, 2015.** Because of the logistics of this event (plane tickets, etc. ...) an early deadline had to be set. Thank you for understanding!

We hope that you will prayerfully lead your group or church to help sponsor a missionary to attend this year's OASIS event. This is an opportunity for us to remind these singles that they have not been forgotten and that we are indeed holding the ropes for them. For more information contact **Ken Rhodes, Director of Missions Mobilization for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board**, at krhodes@mbcb.org, or 800-748-1651, Ext. 398. Make checks payable to the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

Mail donations to:
Missions Mobilization
OASIS 2015
PO Box 530
Jackson MS 39205

SPRING AREA SENIOR RALLIES

Monday, March 23
FBC, Tupelo

Thursday, March 26
FBC, VanCleave

Tuesday, April 7
FBC, Philadelphia

Thursday, April 9
FBC, Brookhaven

For more information contact the Discipleship/Family Ministry Dept. of the MBCB at 601-292-3284, E-mail dbrashier@mbcb.org

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MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE • April 22

FEATURED PRESENTERS: Daniel Caldwell, Ronald Meeks, Wayne VanHorn, Steve Stone

For registration and more information contact the Pastor/Leadership Development Dept. at 800-748-1651, Ext. 305, 601-292-3305, E-mail cwtaylor@mbcb.org

LIFE COMMITMENT SUNDAY APRIL 12, 2015

Life Commitment Sunday - a day to focus attention on the calling to vocational ministry.

For more information visit us at:
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**2015
VBS
REGIONAL
TRAINING**

Time at all locations: 6:30-8:30 p.m.

- 4/23 Colonial Heights Baptist Church, Ridgeland
- 4/28 Poplar Springs Drive Baptist Drive, Meridian
- 4/30 North Oxford Baptist Church, Oxford
- 5/4 Crosspoint Community Church, Hattiesburg
- 5/5 First Baptist Church, Brookhaven

For more information contact the Sunday School Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board at 800-748-1651, Ext. 294, or 601-292-3294

Pray this day for...

March 20 - April 9, 2015

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12 (ESV)

Pray for **Jonathan & Bethany Sharp**, missionaries ministering to European Peoples through church planting & community outreach.

Pray for **Geroge & Geraldine Smith**, missionaries ministering to Sub-Saharan African Peoples through church planting, church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for **Janna Smith**, missionary ministering to American Peoples/Mexico through church planting.

Pray for **Thomas Smith**, missionary ministering to American Peoples/Peru through regional office support.

Pray for **Clay & Jeri Stegall**, missionaries ministering to American Peoples through strategy coordination.

Pray for **Jeanette Taylor**, missionary ministering to Southeast Asian Peoples through regional support.

Pray for **Karl & Peggy Wallace**, missionaries ministering to American Peoples through mission administration, church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for **David & Regina White**, missionaries ministering to American Peoples through church planting, church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for **Floyd & Sylvia Wingo**, missionaries ministering to American Peoples through strategy coordination.

Pray for **Charles & Shannon Worthy**, missionaries ministering to European Peoples through community outreach.

Pray for **James & Mary Adair**, missionaries ministering to Sub-Saharan African Peoples through church planting, church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for **Bethany Allen**, missionary ministering to European Peoples through community outreach & evangelism.

Pray for **Richard & Martha Beal**, missionaries ministering to American Peoples through financial administration, church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for **David & Laurie Bledsoe**, missionaries ministering to American Peoples through church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for **Kaye Brooks**, missionary ministering to American Peoples through church planting.

Pray for **Donald & Donna Brown**, missionaries ministering to European Peoples through church planting, church/home outreach & evangelism.

Pray for **Karen Brown**, missionary ministering to American Peoples through nursing.

Pray for **John & Claudia Brown**, missionaries ministering to Sub-Saharan African Peoples through church/home outreach and evangelism.

Pray for **Matthew Burks**, missionary ministering to European Peoples through evangelism.

The IMB missionaries listed in the HouseTops prayer calendar are currently active in 2-4 year terms or in career service.

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GuideStone announces release of its Ministers' Tax Guide By Roy Hayhurst DALLAS

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COOPERATIVE PROGRAM DINNER

THURSDAY | MAY 14 | 6:30 P.M.

First Baptist Church, Jackson



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HOUSE TOPS

BIBL i O C I P H E R

TDC QBAD WBTEE QBAN WAA QBA WFD

FX JTD MFJZDK ZD T MEFSG GZQB

RFGAO TDC KOATQ KEFON.

ESIA QGADQN-FDA: QGADQN-WAPAD

Clue: E = L

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Hebrews 12:7

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MS POSITIONS

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High court sending strong messages on religious liberty

WASHINGTON (BP) — The U.S. Supreme Court appears to be indicating the White House and some judges still don't get it when it comes to protecting religious liberty.

The justices' latest act regarding the increasingly contentious issue of free exercise of religion came as a rebuke to an appellate ruling in support of rules implementing the administration's abortion/contraception mandate — the battleground that produced the Supreme Court ruling last year commonly known as the Hobby Lobby decision.

In a March 9 order, the high court vacated a ruling by the U.S. Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago against the University of Notre Dame and told the lower court to reconsider its decision in light of the justices' ruling in support of the religious freedom of for-profit companies.

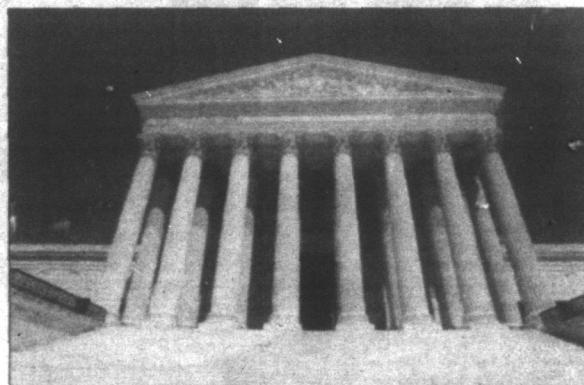
The Seventh Circuit, which hears appeals from Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana, will re-examine its February 2014 ruling against the private, Roman Catholic school near South Bend, Ind., in view of the June win by Hobby Lobby and another business at the Supreme Court.

The abortion/contraception mandate, which was part of the implementation of the 2010 health-care law, requires employers to provide for their workers not only contraceptives but drugs and devices that can potentially cause abortions. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is on its eighth revision of rules in response to complaints that the federal agency failed to protect the conscience rights of employers.

None of those HHS amendments has satisfied the concerns of religious liberty advocates.

The high court's latest action elicited approval from defenders of free exercise of religion. "The Supreme Court took a big step in the direction of liberty and justice," said Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) in Nashville.

"I pray that the present administration will stop its reckless disregard of soul freedom and liberty of conscience."



U.S. SUPREME COURT — WASHINGTON, D.C.

Religious freedom lawyer Mark Rienzi called the justices' order "a strong signal that the Supreme Court will ultimately reject the government's narrow view of religious liberty."

"This is a major blow to the federal government's contraception mandate," said Rienzi, senior counsel of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty in Washington, D.C., which has led the diverse effort challenging the mandate.

"For the past year, the Notre Dame decision has been the centerpiece of the government's effort to force religious ministries to violate their beliefs or pay fines to the [Internal Revenue Service]."

The Seventh Circuit's ruling against Notre Dame left the university as the only non-profit religious ministry in the country without legal protection from the abortion/contraception mandate, according to the Becket Fund.

Four months after the Seventh Circuit's decision, the Supreme Court upheld the objections of Hobby Lobby, the nationwide retail chain owned by evangelical Christians, and Conestoga Wood Specialties, a Pennsylvania cabinet-making company owned by pro-life Mennonites.

The high court justices ruled the HHS mandate did not protect the conscience rights of "closely held" for-profit companies, such as family owned businesses.

While that opinion did not address the many non-profits with objections to the mandate, the Supreme Court acted in a non-profit case in July. It blocked enforcement of the mandate against Wheaton College, a Christian school in suburban Chicago, until the appeal process is complete. The justices' order said the school — and, by likely extension, other objectors — need only inform HHS it is a religious non-profit with religious objections and

not fill out a form required by the government.

In August, HHS issued its eighth rules revision in three years following the Supreme Court actions. The latest regulations provide a non-profit with the option of notifying HHS in writing of its religious objection to providing coverage of all contraceptives or those that are potentially abortion-causing.

In response, the federal government will notify the insurer or a third-party administrator it is responsible for providing employees of the non-profit with payments to cover the services. The new version no longer requires the non-profit to authorize the government to contact its insurer.

The ERLC and other foes of the mandate and its failure to protect the conscience rights of employers strongly criticized the latest revision.

The new option does not eliminate the moral objection by religious organizations, Moore said in October comments filed with HHS. "Non-exempt religious organizations which object to providing abortifacients on moral and religious grounds are still the conduit by which employees receive the drugs and devices," he wrote.

"Non-exempt organizations are unable to comply with the rules, and, at the same time, maintain fidelity to their religious beliefs," Moore said. "The new accommodation is merely a reshuffling of the paperwork and does not resolve the concerns of non-exempt religious organizations: their actions are ultimately providing abortifacients to their employees."

In recent months, some federal appeals courts have upheld the HHS' latest regulations. The most recent decision came in February in the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia against Geneva College, a Christian school in western Pennsylvania.

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CONNECT CAMPS

Student Connect Camps offer fun, spiritual growth

By Ken Hall
Correspondent

Our Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) Student Connect Camps, formerly known as Youth Week when held at the now-closed Gulfshore Assembly in Pass Christian, are almost filled for this summer but there is still plenty of space at the Blue Mountain College (BMC) camp location.

The date for the Blue Mountain College camp is June 15-18. The cost is only \$175 per person and offers an exciting range of camp activities on the beautiful campus of BMC, one of our three Mississippi Baptist institutions of higher learning.

Featuring an engaging large group worship experience as well as small group Bible studies and lots of fun and unique activities, Connect Camps are designed to introduce students to Jesus Christ and help develop followers into bold disciples.

Connect Camps are unique in that campers are able to engage with the camp staff on a more personal level because of the smaller size. Our speakers and leaders all participate alongside campers in all areas of camp life.

The BMC camp will be led by camp pastor Todd Core, minister to students at First Church, Columbus. The Chris Layton Band from Southaven will be leading worship. Gary Permenter of Co-

lumbus is a seminar leader and will be serving as director of activities for the week.

If you've been looking for a camp for your students in grades six through 12, this camp is for you. For more information or to register, contact Rene Edwards in the MBCB Discipleship and Family Ministry Department. Telephone: (601) 292-3283 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 283. E-mail: redwards@mbcb.org.

Registration is also available online at mbcb.org.

Hall is a consultant in the Discipleship and Family Ministry Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically

via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted. Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

Submit news to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

Camp session at Garaywa cancelled

JACKSON, Ms. (Special) – The Missions Camp session for girls scheduled July 20-24 at Garaywa Camp and Conference Center in Clinton has been cancelled. The week was previously listed in the House-tops section of The Baptist Record on Feb. 18 and March 5.

There will be five full weeks of Missions Camp for girls at Garaywa this summer, beginning June 8 and ending with July 17. For more information on the Garaywa summer schedule, visit garaywa.org or call (601) 924-7034.

MBCB sets change in facsimile number

JACKSON, Ms. (Special) – The main facsimile telephone number for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) in Jackson has changed, as part of an ongoing effort to obtain improved communications services at a reduced cost. Effective immediately, the main facsimile telephone number is (601) 714-7419.

The old main facsimile telephone number printed in the 2015 Baptist Diary, on some stationery, and in other MBCB publications is no longer in service. Some MBCB departments may also have recently experienced changes in facsimile numbers. Those departments can be contacted for more information at (601) 968-3800 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651.

Need a light?

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

Compassion for the Lost • Obadiah 1:1-4, 10-17

What is your heartbeat for those who are without Christ? What about those who flagrantly oppose Christ? What are your feelings about those who terrorize Christians? Is there room for compassion for any of these?

Obadiah reveals a word of caution to the Edomites as they stood by watching and gloating over the destruction of Jerusalem. That same word should be heeded by Christians who stand in judgment when hard times come upon those who deny God as if to say "They got what they deserved." They should be thinking, "Except for the grace of God that could be me."

There are strong lessons to be learned from Obadiah.

Check Your Arrogance (Obadiah 1-4)

"Behold, I will make you small among the nations, you will be greatly despised." (v. 2 NKJV)

It has been said many times by many people, "pride comes before the fall". But the prideful seem slow to listen. Obadiah tells the Edomites all the nations will come against them because of their arrogance. While they thought they had a secure place in rocky highlands, with many hiding places and secure positions, they were warned that they would be brought down with the wrath of God using godless people. "Though you as-

cend as high as the eagle...from there I will bring you down." (v. 4)

God speaks to everyone who is caught up in their boasting and pride. It matters not how rich, how powerful, how high and mighty we might become...God is greater and His judgment is strict and final.

Show Mercy and Grace (Obadiah 10-14)

"You should not have gazed on the day of your brother in the day of his captivity, nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah." (v. 12 NKJV)

The Edomites stood by gloating, gazing upon the people of Judah as they were overrun and taken into captivity. Rather than standing with them and offering assistance, they remained at a distance in their place of safety, and even delivered up those who remained to their adversaries. They showed no mercy and for that they would be held accountable.



Explore the Bible

with Kiely D. Young

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus relates the story of man going from Jerusalem to Jericho and was attacked, beaten and left for dead. A priest and a Levite came by, looked and passed on the other side. They remained safe while the man was left for dead. But a Samaritan, despised by Jews, came by and ministered to the man. Jesus said the Samaritan showed himself to be compassionate, not the Jews.

When we see people, attacked by culture and lifestyle, left to fend for themselves any way they can...what should be

our attitude and action? We are called to give a hand up, not just a hand out. We are not to stand in judgment of their lifestyle. We are to show mercy and grace.

Live in Hope (Obadiah 17)

"But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness." (v. 17 NKJV)

Psalm 48:2 "Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount

Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King" (NKJV)

Obadiah declares there is a day coming on Mount Zion when the saving work of our Redeemer shall reign as proclaimed to be the only hope for a world in distress. Obadiah is looking forward to that day. He says it is only to those who put their trust in the work of the Lord, not in their earthly position, who will experience the redeeming grace of God.

We live in a culture that is blinded by self-proclaimed tolerance, the word of a new generation. We are asked to be tolerant of all belief systems, even those who boastfully stand in opposition to God. Just as Obadiah spoke strong to the Edomites, God's Word today speaks to all who would say "Jesus is the only Way" is foolish and intolerant. It is Jesus Himself who said "I am the truth, the way, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6 NKJV)

All...who have ever lived on the face of the earth will one day stand before the King of Kings and be judged, for salvation or as believers for our service to our King. We must have compassion for all.

Young is retired Sunday School Director, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, and a member of Ridgcrest Church, Madison.

Teachings Like No Other • Mark 1:21-22 and 10:17-22

Jesus, the One prophesied like no other and born miraculously like no other, daily displayed power like no other. During His days on Earth, He also delivered teachings like no other.

Luke 2 tells us that by age twelve, Jesus was found sitting in the great temple in Jerusalem listening to the teachers of the Law, asking them interactive dialogue questions, causing them to shake their heads in spiritual wonder. Jesus helped write their Holy Scripture Scrolls as a full partner with Trinity Publishing Company. He would have made a big easy New Orleans "A+" in Dr. George Harrison's Old Testament seminary class. Dispatched on an earthly special assignment by His Father, The Word of God was about to write the gospels by living out His life.

Eighteen years later, Jesus began His public ministry. He called 12 disciples, giving them three imperatives: come and see, follow Me then go and tell. Faithful disciples come and walk with The Master, learn from His teachings and become apostles sent out with His message. His goal was to develop lifelong (never graduating) committed students of His teachings and His Word. They take that Word and share it with others who can become disciples then apostles. Jesus came to teach life. His tenure is eternal.

Mark 1:21-22 describes Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum. On Sabbath, He took His brand new disciples with Him to worship. They heard Him teach. Along with all the other listeners, they were completely "amazed" which means they were completely struck with wonder-filled shock. Unlike their local scribes and teachers, Jesus taught as though He had full authority and that's because He did! Their hometown scribes could only make hand written copies of

The Original. Their Senior Professor was there to stimulate their thinking toward a profession of their faith in Him. They would receive their un-earned grade only if He got the credit.

Our teaching (like no other!) moment is recorded in Mark 10, Matthew 19 and Luke 18. Jesus is on a journey. That journey would end at Calvary. Even on His way to die, Jesus was still reaching out, identifying needs and meeting those needs while calling people to follow.

A man approaches Jesus. Luke identifies him as a "certain ruler." Matthew says that he is "young." All three passages describe him as "very rich." Jesus knew all that, even before this rich young ruler ran to Him. Mark tells us that he knelt before Jesus, addressed Him as "Good Teacher" and began asking a question: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

He had been a "commandment keeper" all his life. Like so many other "good people," he thought that he could earn

his way to Heaven by keeping the Mosaic Law. Jesus knew he was plagued with a deeper need, a dangerous

spiritual condition called MAD: Misplaced Affections Disease. Keeping the Law might assist us in living moral lives, but if we keep the Law and miss Jesus, we are terminally ill with no cure.

This young man was in love with the wrong treasure. His desire was to have and hold his rightful inheritance. He could not hold Jesus personally because he was holding the world by the

tail financially. Jesus would later tell the disciples that the large amount of money was not the problem. Our young man wanted his money more than he desired a relationship with Jesus: that was the problem.

Do not miss this: Jesus loved this man with "agape" love, Calvary love, the deepest love of all. Jesus could not keep walking, abandoning him in that condition. With grace, Jesus presented the opportunity for change. He revealed the content of the young man's heart by pointing straight to the idol of his life which stood between him and spiritual healing. "Sell everything, give that money to the poor and come walk My road."

The young man heard the words of Jesus, immediately grew sorrowful but refused to acknowledge the truth. This Greek word for "sorrowful" also means sad, gloomy, depressed, angry, grudgingly. Worst of all, he "went away from the Teacher. This is not a good direction to take, especially when the teacher is Jesus. Jesus healed physically sick people, but those who were spiritually sick had to surrender in order to be completely healed. When we truly meet Jesus, the Teacher like no other, we walk away changed.

Brown is staff evangelist, First Church, Richland.

Bible Studies for Life

with Becky Brown



Revivals & Homecomings

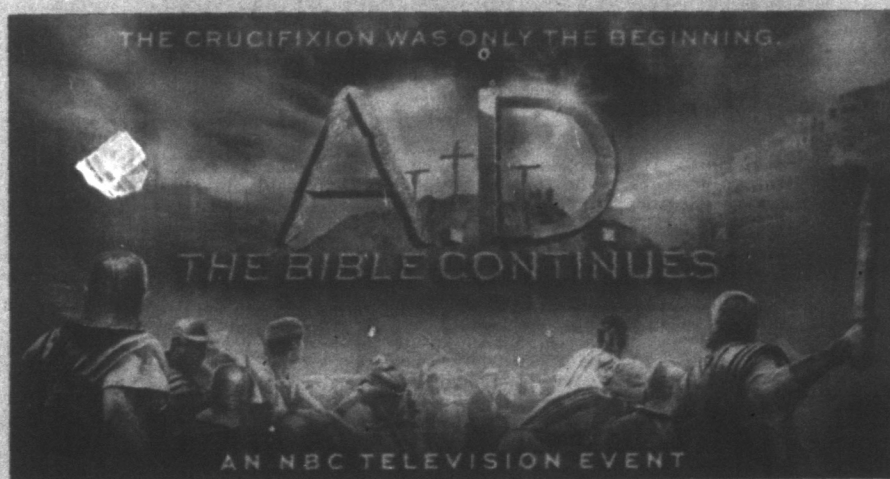
► **Holly Church, Alcorn Association:** Revival, Mar. 22 - 25; Sun., 8:45 a.m., 11 a.m. and 6

p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 6:30 p.m.; Steve Hale, speaker; Bob Smith, music; John Boler, pastor.

► **First Church, Boyle:** Revival, Mar. 25 - 28; 7 p.m. nightly; speakers, Gabby Hays, Wed.; John Shackleford, Thurs.; Kevin Franklin, Fri.; Guy Burke, Sat.; Russell Steadman, music.

► **First Church, Stonewall:** Revival, Mar. 22 - 25; Sun., Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.; worship, 10:50 a.m., followed by potluck lunch and 6 p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 7 p.m.; Randall Creel,

speaker; Lee Robinson, music. ► **Airport Church, Grenada:** Revival, Mar. 22 - 25; 7 p.m. nightly; Kevin Crofford, speaker; special music nightly; John Lancaster, pastor.



More television on the way from Downey/Burnett team

NASHVILLE (BP) — Actress and producer Roma Downey and reality TV show producer Mark Burnett recently shared with media professionals about the making of A.D.: The Bible Continues, their follow-up project to the popular TV series The Bible.

The newest series is a 12-part continuation of The Bible that portrays the history of the early church according to the first 10 chapters of Acts. The series will air on NBC beginning Easter, April 5.

Filmed in Morocco, A.D. will delve into the book of Acts in an effort to show the humanity and true character of the apostles, as well as their devotion to take the Gospel to the world no matter the cost. The persecution of the early church and its growth are also highlighted.

"We pulled from history and Acts using scholars from both areas and wove it together into a cool, relatable, true, and compelling story so people can see what the early church was like," said Downey during the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) convention in Nashville on Feb. 23-26.

NRB president and chief executive officer Jerry Johnson, former dean and staffer at both Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., commended Downey and Burnett for their research and efforts to capture an accurate portrayal of the historical and political setting.

Burnett noted the characters in A.D. look much like people in today's society. Acknowledging the Roman Empire was a melting pot in its day, Burnett said this cast is more diverse.

Burnett credited the opportunity for this latest series to the success of The Bible, which drew 100 million viewers. "In Canada, The Bible series even beat out hockey," he said, hop-



BURNETT (LEFT) AND DOWNEY

ing it will continue to open the door for more projects like the A.D. series.

Southern Baptist Convention President Ronnie Floyd, who also spoke during the NRB conference, endorsed the new TV series in a statement. "A.D. is Biblically based, historically supported, and creatively integrated as an epic story that will captivate generations globally," he said.

Burnett said, "Christians need to be noisier in regards to letting Hollywood know what we want." Devon Franklin, a Hollywood producer who just formed his own company to make God-honoring films, echoed Burnett's sentiment during the conference.

"The power of our unified voices (as believers) is important. The biggest way[s] we vote [are] when you turn on your TV and pay for your movies at the box office, so choose those that honor God."

The series begins with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and then chroni-

cles an intense time in history. Downey refers to it as, "A time filled with enormous faith, persecution, brutal Roman oppression, and the desperate Jewish revolt — a time when history would be changed forever."

Downey said she hopes God will use the new series for His glory. She said Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Ca., and author of The Purpose Driven Life, warned her, "The most dangerous prayer you can pray is, 'Lord, use me' — because He might just answer you."

Both Downey and Burnett said they encountered spiritual warfare last year as they worked on the new series. Their son Cameron collapsed while they were filming in Morocco and was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Burnett said the family continues to "covet the prayers of God's people."

For more information on the series, visit nbc.com/ad-the-bible-continues.

Hankins, Henderson appointed to serve on SBC committee

COLUMBUS, Ohio (BP) — Eric Hankins, senior pastor of First Church, Oxford, and Chip Henderson, senior pastor of Pinelake Church, Brandon, will represent Mississippi Baptists on the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Committee on Committees, SBC president Ronnie Floyd has announced.

The Committee on Committee appointments are made each year in accordance with SBC Bylaw 19, which calls for providing notice to Southern Baptists of the appointees no later than 45 days in advance of each year's Convention.

The Committee on Committees will assemble in Columbus, Oh., just prior to the SBC's June 16-17 an-

nual meeting to nominate members of the Committee on Nominations who, in turn, nominate trustees for the boards of SBC entities.



HANKINS



HENDERSON

SBC Bylaw 19 also provides that the Committee on Committees "shall nominate all special committees authorized during the sessions of the Convention not otherwise provided for."

The Committee on Committees has 68 members, two from each of the 34 states and regions qualified for representation on boards of SBC entities.

The president named Bryan Smith, pastor of First Church, Roanoke, Va., to serve as chairman of this year's Committee on Committees.

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